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ABSTRACT

Nearly 80,000 scholars currently serve as department chairs, and almost one-quarter will need to be replaced each year. Such a high turnover rate is partly due to surprises and unexpected sacrifices embedded in the department chair position. In an effort to help professors prepare for and overcome unforeseen tradeoffs, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) conducted a survey in the spring 1990. This comprehensive survey included 808 department chairs in 101 research and doctoral-granting universities across the United States. Eight department chairs were selected from each institution. The subjects evaluated personal tradeoffs associated with their acquired position as a department chair. Four main questions were asked: (1) Do they have enough time to continue the professional and personal activities they enjoyed before becoming chair? (2) If time has significantly shifted between faculty, managerial, and personal activities, are they satisfied with this change? (3) What stresses and pressures are created when a faculty member assumes the chair position? and (4) What impact will this leadership change have on their professional career? In order to make the chair position more attractive and tenable to promising candidates, five changes are suggested: restructure the position; purge unnecessary administrative; reverse the hierarchy; protect research interests; and train for leadership. Two tables and 13 references are appended. (LAP)

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**PAYING THE PRICE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP:
DEPARTMENT CHAIR TRADEOFFS**

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PAYING THE PRICE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: DEPARTMENT CHAIR TRADEOFFS

Scholars and administrators alike speak about "a great leadership crisis" in higher education. Blue ribbon commissions and executive reports call for bolder and better college and university leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989). The search for solutions to the leadership dilemma leads us to thousands of leadership studies, most of which are contradictory and inconclusive. Leaders: are born, not made -- made not born; possess distinctive trait -- no special traits at all; must use power and influence -- merely manage symbols and the academic culture.

Rarely do we study what is perhaps the most important impediment to attracting academic leaders to the smallest yet most significant unit in the university, the administration of the academic department where nearly 80% of all administrative decisions take place (Roach, 1976). What **price** does a professor **pay** for academic leadership? What surprises and sacrifices are embedded in the department chair position?

Nearly 80,000 scholars currently serve as department chairs and almost one quarter will need to be replaced each year. Therefore, not only is the need for quality leadership evident but the magnitude in terms of sheer numbers impacts higher education institutions.

Unfortunately, chairs often see themselves as scholars who, out of a sense of duty, **temporarily** accept responsibility for the administrative tasks so other professors can continue with their teaching and scholarly pursuits. They come to the position without leadership training (Booth, 1982); without prior administrative experience (Shtogren, 1978); without a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their role (Bennett, 1982); without recognition of the metamorphic changes that occur as one transforms from a professor to a chair (Gmelch and

Seedorf, 1989); and without an awareness of the cost to their academic career and personal lives (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly and Beyer, 1990).

While the position of academic department chair has received much attention, most information has come in the form of anecdotal speeches, professional papers, popular journal articles, and how-to books, with a few data-based studies interspersed. Yet many of the studies result in lists of duties and responsibilities too long to have meaning. What is needed is more understanding of how chairs see themselves, their challenges and sacrifices.

In the spring of 1990 the UCEA Center for the Study of the Department Chair at Washington State University conducted a comprehensive survey of 808 department chairs in 101 research and doctoral granting universities across the United States. Eight department chairs were selected from each institution, stratified by eight discipline classifications of hard vs. soft, applied vs. pure, and life vs. nonlife, resulting in a sample of 808 chairs. Five hundred, seventy-six surveys were returned representing a 71.3% response rate.

The purpose of the study was to understand how department chairs see themselves in terms of their use of time, experience with stress, role orientation, transition to the chair position, and commitment to academic leadership. This article addresses the tradeoffs professors had to make to become department chairs. It illuminates the "dark side" of the department chair position, not to discourage candidates from seeking the challenges of academic leadership but help them recognize, prepare for and overcome unforeseen tradeoffs.

A personal or professional tradeoff is defined as "an exchange of one thing in return for another; especially, a giving up of something desirable. . ." (New College Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). In essence life is a tradeoff, yet success depends in large measure on making effective tradeoffs. In the case of department chairs, have they been able to keep a balance among their

faculty, administrative and personal lives? Or, do they perceive that they have accepted the leadership challenge at the expense of their professorial pleasures?

As professors take on the position of department chair, the answers to four central questions impact the degree to which tradeoffs were effective or not. (1) Do they have enough time to continue their professional and personal activities they enjoyed before becoming chair? (2) If time has shifted significantly between faculty, managerial and personal activities, are they satisfied with these changes? (3) What stresses and pressures are created when a faculty member assumes the chair position? (4) What impact will this leadership change have on their professional career?

Tradeoffs: The Chair's Game of Balancing Time and Stress

One of the prices professors must pay when they enter the chair position is time. Since time is inelastic and irreplaceable one must trade off faculty time for newly acquired administrative duties. Four properties of tradeoffs highlight the price of leadership (Greiff and Munter, 1980). First, *tradeoffs act much like a ledger, a [chair] cannot debit one side without crediting the other*. As professors assume the chair position the credits added to the administrative side of the ledger must be debited against certain faculty activities. In other words, the chair position comes at some cost to faculty time since time resembles a "zero-sum" game space--everyone has 24 hours in a day, no less and no more.

The department chairs in this study were asked whether they have spent more, the same, or less time in professional and personal activities since they became chairs. Table 1 reveals a dramatic shift in time spent in **professional** activities of research and writing, keeping current in their discipline, and teaching. Chairs reported spending 88%, 82% and 56% less time in these activities, respectively. The reduction in time spent was not as pronounced in the other **professional** areas of "service" and "contact with students and colleagues inside and outside of the institutions".

The second property of tradeoffs is that *tradeoffs between professional and personal interests vie for the same resource -- time*. The second part of Table 1 shows an almost equally pronounced percent of chairs reduced their **personal** time with family (65%), friends (56%) and leisure (77%) due to administrative duties. Spiritual and civic activities basically remained "the same" for most chairs.

The third property of tradeoffs becomes even more important when considering chairs' satisfaction with their shifts in time: *Tradeoffs can create dissatisfaction with personal and professional lives*. Chairs were asked if they were satisfied with their shift in time allocations. As Figure 1 portrays, of those chairs who lost time, an overwhelming percent expressed dissatisfaction with debiting their time in scholarly writing and research (87.5%) and keeping current in their discipline (94%) as well as their personal loss of time with family (89%), friends (87.5%) and leisure (80.5%). As an aside, in this study over 80% of the chairs believed that "their loads should be lightened to make more time for research, writing or other work in the field," and that "if no opportunity was available to do personal research (they) would find the job less satisfying." Ironically, those chairs who spent less time teaching were split: 55% satisfied and 45% dissatisfied with their reduced teaching loads.

The final tradeoff property illuminates another price one pays for leadership: *Too many tradeoffs in one direction creates an imbalance and leads to negative stress*. Chairs seem to be trapped between the pressures and demands of performing not only as administrators, but also as productive faculty members. The faculty member vs. administrator paradox is reconfirmed when we compare the most serious stressors of chairs were compared with those of faculty. Table 2 contrasts the present National Study of Department Chairs with the National Study of Faculty Stress (Gmelch, Wilke and Lovrich, 1984), each based upon comparable samples from the population of 213 Research I and II and Doctoral Granting I and II universities in the United States. Almost six of every ten chairs suffer from "heavy workloads" compared

to 40% of the professors. Note also in Table 2 that not only do chairs identify the same seven "most serious stressors" as faculty, but the percent of chairs experiencing excessive stress is higher than the percent of faculty in each case, except for "excessively high self-expectations" (typically more troublesome for staff-type positions -- faculty -- than line management positions --department chairs. In addition, chairs also indicated serious stress from the managerial stressors of program approval, complying with rules and regulations, completing paperwork on time, resolving collegial differences, and making decisions affecting lives of other. Not only do they seem to retain many of the highest faculty stressors while in the chair position, they also add the managerial stressors of confrontation with colleagues, new time demands and institutional constraints (Gmelch and Burns, 1990). This paradoxical situation of trying to fill a "swivel" position causes department chairs to feel double pressure to be an effective manager and productive faculty member. The cost of this paradox appears to be *excessive stress*.

What price do department chairs pay for their venture into administration? Do they now perceive themselves as "administrators" or do they retain their faculty identity? When the chairs in this study were asked about their orientation, 60% identified themselves as faculty and 23% as administration. Then, does this move into leadership significantly change their career orientation? While 54% of the chairs would serve again, 29% would not, and 16% were still undecided. Ultimately, 65% of chairs returned to faculty status after serving as department chair and only 19% continued in higher education administration (Carroll, 1990).

Illuminating the "dark side" of the department chair position does not go without highlighting some rewards and benefits. Monetarily, for example, 72% of the chairs in this study received an administrative stipend averaging 12% or \$3,432. Most would also privately say that status and prestige comes with the position. But to admit to their faculty colleagues that they enjoy the job causes suspicion.

Besides the salary benefits, Tucker (1984) highlights the psychic rewards:

... there is the personal satisfaction derived from helping others with their professional development and from helping to guide and build an effective academic program. There is the challenge of leadership, which many people find invigorating. They find rewards in guiding the guiders of students, shaping curricula, defending the interests of the department, and interacting with other academic leaders, including deans and vice-presidents. Many have come to feel that their ability to motivate others to greatness perhaps exceeds their ability to motivate themselves. Some of these chairpersons want to enhance their administrative effectiveness by developing whatever additional skills are necessary to implement the management process. Some chairpersons see the acquisition of such skills as a prerequisite for further advancement in academic administration. (p. 389)

Nevertheless, regarding the last line in Tucker's recitation of benefits, remember that only one in five chairs (19%) advances his or her academic career into administration. The result of the tradeoffs faculty members must make to serve as department chairs seems to dissuade them from continuing in administration. In fact, a follow-up study to the National Study of Department Chairs concluded that psychologically many department chairs never make the full transition to the role of department chair (Seedorf, 1990).

The final prognosis is that we continue to have a "leadership crisis" in higher education. What is the answer to attracting and retaining effective leaders in higher education? Listed below are a few changes which may make the chair position more attractive and tenable to promising candidates.

1. **Restructure the position.** Reduce the expectations of the position to a half-time assignment with proper support to manage the key responsibilities of the position. Besides secretarial support, add a research assistant to the office management team to conduct the necessary reports for the university, state agencies and outside constituencies.

2. **Purge unnecessary administrlivia.** Related to restructuring the position is the need to reduce the amount of paperwork and requests for reports rarely read.

Since the highest stress on chairs comes from overload, the chair should concentrate on the department's high pay-off activities rather than respond to the urgent, but sometimes not so important. Each request should be measured against its contribution to the department's mission and goals.

3. Reverse the hierarchy. Traditionally and structurally universities are top-down hierarchies. Chairs serve at the pleasure of and for the dean. One might ask why deans exist? Hopefully, a partial answer is to provide support and leadership for their production supervisors, department chairs. In turn, chairs should serve their faculty as faculty serve the students.

4. Protect research interests. Data from this study confirms that chairs need more time for their scholarly pursuits while serving departments. If their time for research is not protected, they become dissatisfied and are more reluctant to continue as chair. Simple modifications such as providing released time for research, maintaining a separate research office, and supporting a research assistant while serving as chair might produce a work environment conducive to productive administration and scholarship.

5. Train for leadership. It is well established that few chairs receive training to prepare and maintain their skills in leadership. The cost of leadership is too great not to invest in the most critical unit in the university. Both managerial skills and leadership perspectives will be needed to equip department chairs to meet the challenges facing higher education in the 21st Century.

In order to prevent the imbalance caused by time, stress and job dissatisfaction, chairs and institutions of higher education will have to perform a number of these balancing acts to create a leadership position which both challenges and satisfies scholars willing to serve as academic leaders.

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FIGURE 1
Satisfaction of Department Chairs with Less Time for
Professional and Personal Activities
(Percent of Chairs Reporting Loss of Time)

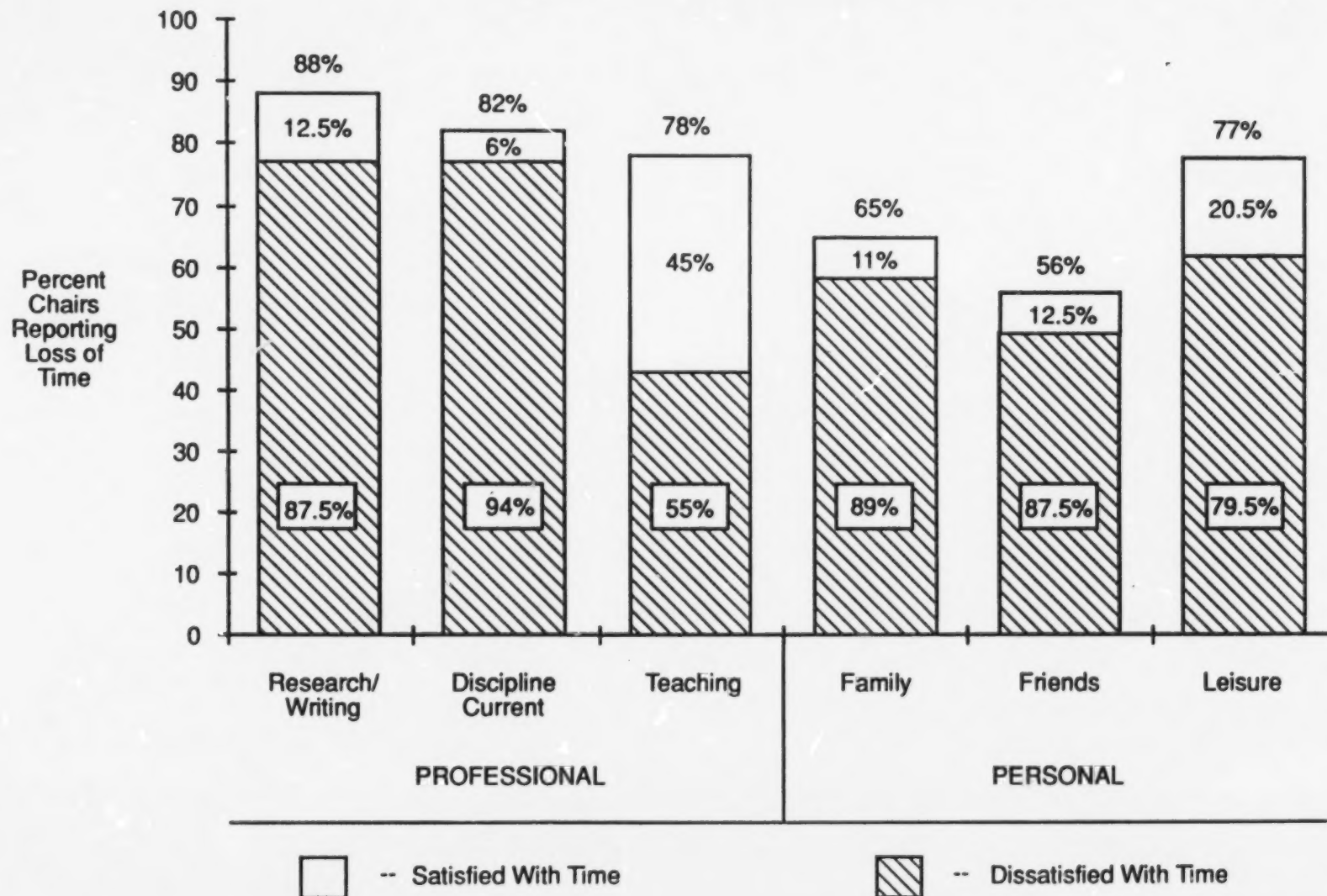


Table 2

Comparison of Chair and Professor Stress

Stressors	<u>Chairs</u>		<u>Professors</u>	
	Rank	Serious Stress	Rank	Serious Stress
Heavy work load	1	59%	5.5	40%
Obtaining program approval	2	54%	N/A	N/A
Keeping current	3	53%	3	49%
Complying with rules	4	48%	-	-
Job interfering/personal time	5	47%	7	35%
Decisions affecting others	6	46%	-	-
Excessive self expectations	7	45%	1	53%
Resolving collegial differences	8	45%	-	-
Evaluating faculty	9	42%	N/A	N/A
Completing paperwork	10	41%	-	-
Preparing manuscripts	11	40%	5.5	40%
Telephone/visitor interruptions	12	40%	9.5	33%
Meetings	13	40%	9.5	33%